

Industrial goth mischief-makers toy with the classics on their covers album

GERMANY'S LORD OF The Lost lived up to their name at Eurovision 2023, limping home in last place. And that's fine. The five-piece thrust their sparkling gimp-sticks into millions of homes, driving curious ears toward eight records packed with gothic industrial, symphonia and lovelorn litanies. Never to waste an opportunity, they've since

"THEY LINGER IN THEIR COMFORT ZONE OF SPOOPY ROCK"

lapped stadiums supporting Iron Maiden, now consolidating their gains with... a covers album. Are they flushing all that blood and glitter down the shitter? Yes and no. This isn't Imperial Triumphant pretending to know Metallica's Motorbreoth and just doing jazzy death metal instead. Rather, Lord Of The Lost linger in their comfort zone - these are all

massive tunes, easily transposed to their spoopy, keyboard-laden rock template.

Billy Idol's Shock To The System does as the title suggests, if only because it's not White Wedding or Rebel Yell. Frontman Chris Harms delivers the curled-lip charm of 90s Idol, filtered through his boss-level

baritone; it's sleaze, sex, soße. Niklas Kahl gets up to all sorts of rototom foolery behind the kit, dispensing comically 80s percussion with abandon. It's this cheekiness, this unbridled glee, that transforms Keane's Somewhere Only We Know into more than a soundtrack for break-ups and Christmas adverts. We're not talking Spider God levels of defiling Whitney Houston with black metal, but it undoubtedly winks and nudges around those milieus of piss-taking. That, or the band have zero self-awareness.

Scrutinising the album's functionality in this fashion rends it wonky, though. Bronski Beat's gay anthem Smalltown Boy already got the sad goth treatment from Paradise Lost two decades ago; when LOTL's Chris parps a piercing, Devin

ALBUM REVIEWS



Townsend-ish scream, it just reminds you that Devin literally performed on Paradise Lost's version, Similar problems erect themselves on Turbo Lover, Judas Priest's synth-drenched, hard-rocking ode to grabbing rigid shafts and cranking them. Chris leans into that vibrato chorus, but Rob Halford he ain't; the force of Priest's original doesn't penetrate here.

And that's the rub: they've happened upon tracks initially sung by superstars. LOTE's twinkly industrial is polished, streamlined yet spacious, demanding their frontman to lead. When the stuff he's orating was first recorded by Halford, Midge Ure, and The King Of Pop/Questionable Chimp Owner Michael Jackson, he's banking for a spanking. This uncanny hollowness rings across newer tracks, too, LOTL seem pretty stoppable during Sia's Unstoppable, less a Porsche with no brakes and more a Fiat with shagged

suspension. Same goes for Bishop Briggs' River, its chorus falling prey to the trap sprung on Devildriver's cover of Sail by AWOLNATION - the drop's there to showcase a powerhouse performance that never arrives. The most intriguing rendition is Cutting Crew's (I Just) Died In Your Arms, its curiosities twofold. First, it ends like a melodeath tune. Second, Chris duets with Anica Russo - a German singer-songwriter whose Eurovision 2023 hopes were dashed by, um, this band.

Weapons Of Mass Seduction isn't essential, though if you love Lord Of The Lost's shtick, fill your kinky boots, tuck into the 20-plus covers - you won't be disappointed. Otherwise, it's just a marginally horny karaoke booth.

____ FOR FANS OF: Deathstars, Sabaton, Rammstein

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



ABHORIA Depths PROSTHETIC

Californian black metal evil-doers do it properly

USBM's elemental weirdness has brought many grotesque pleasures, but big, unapologetic black metal records have been relatively thin on the ground. The extent of Abhoria's ambitions aren't made clear on their second album, but there's no mistaking the sound of epic, vengeful extremity as suited to big stages as it surely is to small, sweaty ones. Depths has plenty of moments where the LA dwellers tinker at the edges of tradition, but its real strength is that every song sounds like it was recorded with all available feet planted on spot-lit monitors. Particularly lethal on deeper, darker cuts like Devour and The Well, Abhoria ooze confidence, command, and a genuine interest in making heads bang.

FOR FANS OF: Dark Funeral, Immortal, Necrophobic DOM LAWSON



ADVOCACY The Path Of Decoherence

Donish prog metallers bring some muscle to their debut LP

Eight years and two EPs since their formation, Advocacy's debut album has been a long time coming. Always wanting to push themselves and the boundaries of progressive metal, the five-piece have gone heavier and more

complex and, by and large, it's paid off. Leop Of Faith's changing time signatures are handled well, and the decision to include growled vocals on Deranged proves inspirational. It doesn't always hit - Prayer For The Reckless, for example, lumbers in the middle and causes the attention to wane - but there's enough sparkle across The Path Of Decoherence to pique the interest of anyone invested in this scene.

FOR FANS OF: Dream Theater, Leprous, Between The Buried And Me

ELLIOT LEAVER



ANY GIVEN DAY Limitless ARISING EMPIRE

German metalcore upstarts make a move for the mainstream

Over the last few years, many modern metalcore artists have segued into the realm of US radio rock with very mixed results. This German crew are frustratingly unable to nail the formula. They start promisingly enough, with a big Poison The Well-style metallic hardcore riff opening Get That Done. Limitless falls off a cliff soon after, though, to retreat into a series of bland, formulaic clean choruses and phonedin emoting. Apocalypse's powerful mid-section breakdown comes laced with a load of mush that makes it sound like the unwanted love child of Emmure, Bad Wolves and Skillet, It's unmemorable, opportunistic and lacking in any real personality. You'd comfortably find a better release than Limitless on any given day.

FOR FANS OF: Bad Wolves, Asking Alexandria, From Ashes To New

STEPHEN HILL



BRIGHT & BLACK

The Album

SELF RELEASED

Apocalyptica, Meshuggah and Watain members help score a classical marvel

BROWTHELACK

EVER SINCE EDDIE Van Halen revolutionised guitar playing with a style derived from his boyhood training as a pianist, metal's ties to classical music have been evident to anyone paying

attention. That's never more so than in extreme metal, where the various layers of contrasting complexity are the sound of orchestral sections distilled into guitars, drums and bass, Bright & Black seek to herald this legacy, asking a stellar array of metal musicians to compose for the Baltic

Sea Philharmonic orchestra, with - for obvious reasons - Apocalyptica's Eicca Toppinen as their soloist.

This fierce ensemble is conducted by the innovative Kristjan Järvi, who's made a career of pushing the limits of what modern classical can be. The results are frequently startling. Bloodgrind, composed by Entombed AD's Nico Elgstrand, is death metal without the distortion, carried on a pumping beat. Even the harsh vocals are emulated through grinding percussion, to surprisingly effective results. Eicca's Collateral Damage is cinematic in scope,

its graceful strings interspersed with the kind of score that usually bolsters epic silver screen confrontations. Erik Danielsson offers an emotive lament in the form of Mounts Of Misfortune. Bold

and rousing, it highlights the fervent passion that has long fuelled Watain. Meshuggah's Tomas Haake and Dick Lövgren's signature rhythmic puzzles are instantly recognisable on Armies Of The Preposterous.

Suffice to say, this is a fascinating interpretation of a genre that many in

the classical world would disregard as lowbrow, when it has in fact been pushing the boundaries of what's possible with multi-layered musical composition for decades. Metal took classical music's torch and ran with it, making this an album more important to classical music than it is metal. We've known for ages what this music's capable of; let's hope The Album opens more ears and eyes to the possibilities.

FOR FANS OF: Trans-Siberian Orchestra, Emperor, Ayreon TOM O'BOYLE



BLOOD RED THRONE Nonagon SOULSTILLER

Kristiansand's prolific killers undergo a dark revolution

Norway's death metal scene favours quality over quantity, but Blood Red Throne have cleverly managed both over the last 25 years. With a new vocalist, Sindre Wathne Johnsen, their 11th album feels like a significant reset. The myopic brutality of early classics like Altered Genesis remains a predatory force, but this is a more measured litany of violent acts. If 2021's Imperial Congregation was the big label blowout, Nonagon is the defiant return to the underground, wherein slower tempos and jarring flashes of black metal offset the production's modernist crunch. The deeply trippy Split Tongue Sermon and grim finale Fleshrend hint at more adventurous sounds to come, and Ode To The Obscene is a perfect blur of haughtiness and hate.

FOR FANS OF: Vomitory, Benediction, Frozen Soul DOM LAWSON



CALIGULA'S HORSE Charcoal Grace INSIDEDUTMUSIC

American progressive metallers find new resonance in the familiar

Thirteen years in, this Brisbane quartet are best recognised within the realm of progressive metal, and yet they've perfected a sound that weaves several differing styles, including alt rock and metal, into

something unique. Album six relives the fear and uncertainty brought on by Covid. If that subject's started to become a little wearisome, Caligula's Horse summon emotional depth and immense musical and compositional skill to create something of genuine resonance and beauty. From 10-minute opener The World Breathes With Me to its majestic title cut - 24 minutes and four suites that seem to fly by in a jiffy - Charcoal Grace is a masterclass in light and shade, power and subtlety.

FOR FANS OF: Haken, Leprous, Tesseract DAVE LING



CARIOSUS Will, Until Beauty

Melodeath/deathcore young bucks throw down all their aces

Ten years in, Chicago duo Cariosus are clearly sick of waiting for the industry to notice them and have selfreleased their debut album. Will, Until Beauty, according to the band, draws from death, black and neoclassical influences, while it explores the recesses of the human psyche. The eight songs actually form a fusion of deathcore and melodeath: a mixture that may be comparable to The Black Dahlia Murder and Whitechapel when it comes to exhilaration, but also feels fully exhausted by the end of these 35 minutes. Although Will, Unto Beauty is entertaining in its own right, Cariosus will have to pull from new pastures if they want listeners to come back for album number two.

FOR FANS OF: Whitechapel, The Black Dahlia Murder, Suicide Silence

MATT MILLS



THE CLAMPS Megamouth HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

italian hard rockers unleash a gripping third album

When the pandemic forced them off the road, rather than spinning their wheels, The Clamps decided to write their third album. instead. Funnelling all of their frustrations during that uncertain era into 10 stoner and garage rockfuelled tracks, the Italian power trio's latest is a fast and furious thrill ride. Wearing its Zeke, Fu Manchu and early Hellacopters influences on its tattered denim sleeve, Megamouth is a bruising fusion of filthy guitars and soaring solos. Their ode to 70s drag racer Bill Jenkins is as badass as the man himself and brimming with breakneck riffs and leather-lunged vocals, while the catchy Bombs sees them bolster their sound with classic rock hooks. Gloriously feral and full of pure rock fury, Megamouth deserves to make The Clamps a new force in the underground.

FOR FANS OF: Zeke, Fu Manchu, The Heliacopters EDWIN McFEE



DOMINUM Hey Living People NAPALM

Teutonic power metallers uncover a few fresh horrors

Playing fist-pumping power metal with a horror fixation, Dominum place themselves somewhere between Powerwolf and Lordi. But where it should

lend them a distinctive character, instead it leaves them chasing the shadows of the countless bands who have taken a similar concept further. They're just a little too tongue-incheek to match the Broadway theatricality of Ice Nine Kills or even the glam radio sensibilities of Lordi. Project mastermind Felix Heldt - knob-twiddler for the likes of Visions Of Atlantis and Feuerschwanz - ensures they have a few bangers in the vault to prove the concept isn't totally bust, however. Immortalis Dominum, Danger Danger, We All Taste The Same and Frankenstein all capture the glorious OTT energies and occasional AOR leanings that have made German power metal so enduringly lovable over the past 40-plus years.

FOR FANS OF: Edguy, Powerwolf, Lordi RICH HOBSON



DROWN IN SULPHUR Dark Secrets Of The Soul SCARLET

Spiritually elevating odes from the deathcore, black metal borderlands

Taking modern deathcore and infusing it with 90s black metal, the second album from Drown In Sulphur sees the corpsepainted Milan quartet embark on a sinister, brooding journey that explores man's search for spiritual elevation largely delivered via a furious combination of chugging riffs, blastbeats and breakdowns. The black metal elements add another dimension to the sound without ever dominating, although Unholy Light and the title track display their icy traits most prominently in the form of a high-end guitar

tone and vocalist Chris 'Christ' Lombardo utilising the shriller end of his vocal range. The melodious Lotus is another standout, incorporating an acoustic opening and epic, atmospheric keyboards. Dark Secrets ... brims with potential, adding yet more richness to deathcore's current purple patch.

FOR FANS OF: Lorna Shore, Thy Art is Murder, Worm Shepherd

ELLIOT LEAVER



EMIL BULLS Love Will Fix It ARISING EMPIRE

Munich alt metallers liebe-rate themselves from their past angst

Emil Bulls have come

a long way since the nu metal angst of their early oos releases. Their latest effort sees the Munich five-piece swapping out downtuned misery for lovelorn anthems, packed out with bright, uplifting alt metal bangers. Sick sparkles with soaring riffs as it worships the omnipotence of love, while the title track repackages the same message in a burst of bright, buoyant heavy metal. With all the sappiness, their attempts at anger tend to lack venom, however. Opener Backstabbers does broil with rage, yet, as Christoph von Freydorf later sings 'Doom, doom, doom... is coming for you,' on Whirlwind Of Doom, it's about as intimidating as a puppy chasing its tail, gutturals be damned. Love Will Fix It's strength undeniably lies in its optimistic anthems, the culminating cry for unity on Together a satisfyingly poignant ending note. THE RESERVE TO SERVE THE RESERVE THE RESER

FOR FANS OF: Skillet, Shinedown, Seether **EMILY SWINGLE**

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'



ALLUVIAL Death Is But A Door **MUCLEAR BLAST**

Alluvial's new EP is a more perverse affair than the impressive prog death of 2021's Sarcoma album. Bog Dweller's myrtad ideas are wiped away as the unsettling Fogbelt and the despairing title track send the EP down a dark path.

____ ADAM BRENNAN



GOING OFF Kill List TATAL STREET

Across eight tracks in 11 minutes, this Manchester crew offer no-frills, never-relenting, insanely aggressive old-school punk rock and hardcore that sounds like it would sooner stab you than shake your hand. Absolutely terrifying.

-----STEPHEN HILL



LIFESICK Love And Other Lies METAL BLADE

These Danish up-andcomers present a bleak yet eclectic vision on their new EP. After Every Unpleasant Emotion's outlaw country, Lifesick plummet into hellish hardcore on Rude Awakening and death metal on Reverse Birth.

------MATT MILLS



ESCUELA GRIND DDEEAATTHHMMEETTAALL MINRIK HEAVY

The fast-rising New England metallic hardcore crew's love letter to death metal reveals once again just how versatile and potent this band are. Barney Greenway's appearance on Meat Magnet is a facepeeling seal of approval.

------JACK TERRY



KRVNA The Rhythmus Of Death Eternal ZAZEN SOUNDS

Three highly atmospheric new melo-black spellbinders from Sydney's one-man metal inferno. The creepy-crawling A God's Work pairs brilliantly with two adventurous Bathory and Abigor covers.

KEN MCINTYRE



PANZERCHRIST All Witches Shall Burn **EMANZIPATION**

Denmark's most devilish death/black metallers are on top spooky form on their new EP. Stocked full of witches, rats and Lord Satan himself, these four tracks are delivered with a violent, characteristically convincing flourish.

-------DOM LAWSON



CHILDREN OF BODOM

A Chapter Called Children Of Bodom: The Final Show In Helsinki Ice Hall 2019

Chlon Of Barn

SPINEFARM

Finnish melodic metal icons bow out in untouchable form

WHEN ALEXI LAIHO disbanded Children Of Bodom in 2019, then passed away just 12 months later, it left a chasm that no metal band - no matter how flamboyant, talented or charismatic

- have filled since. The Wildchild was a once-ina-lifetime rock star within extreme metal. Plus, his guitar playing's trade-offs with keyboardist Janne Wirman were so impressive and fun that few have even dared to replicate them. All of the idiosyncrasies that made both Alexi and his band

great have now been immortalised on A Chapter Called Children Of Bodom: the recording of the last live show the Finns ever played.

The end of Bodom was effectively foreshadowed weeks before this December 2019 gig, with Janne, drummer Jaska Raatikainen and bassist Henkka Seppälä all announcing their exits in November, That the line-up was able to sustain itself for this finale - let alone make it such a triumphant, valiant send-off - says everything about their commitment to being one of metal's most endearingly bombastic forces.

Under Grass And Clover, from 2019's swansong album Hexed, instantly flaunts Alexi and Janne's neo-classical chops. After the two exchange fanciful melodies, the more upfront in Your Face

> declares, I don't give a fuck, motherfucker!" symbolising the bluntforce intensity of modern classic Hate Crew Deathroll

It's the concert's closing half-hour, however, that truly shows Bodom at their best. Follow The Reaper, Deadnight Warrior, Needled 24/7, Hate Mel, Hate Crew Deathroll, Lake Bodom and

Downfall form a series of hits from the band's golden age - and each one reinforces with bulletproof strength the all-adrenaline songwriting that made the band megastars. That nonstop excellence makes Alexi's closing farewell all the more heartbreaking in hindsight, Even on their final night as a band, Children Of Bodom were peerless in the field of infectious, exuberant and unabashedly rowdy metal music.

FOR FANS OF: Arch Enemy, Necrophobic, in Flames MATT MILLS



EXOCRINE Legend

French virtuosos summon another kraken from the outer realms

Rewarded for consistently startling, envelope-pushing albums, this Bordeaux quartet have saved their best for their Season Of Mist debut. Legend is bigger and more experimental than even previous efforts Maeistrom and The Hybrid Suns. Whether it's The Altar Of War's wall of sound or the jazz trumpet permeating the title track's dizzying labyrinth, each song possesses feroclously heavy riffs and craniumimploding skill. Yet what sets Exocrine apart among the tech-death elite is their penchant for subversive melodic hooks that add a palpable potency to Dragon and epic finale By The Light Of The Pyre, which traverses strings, lightspeed riffing, Herculean percussion and evocative twin leads.

FOR FANS OF: Archapire. Gorod, Beyond Creation ADAM BRENNAN



HIRAES Dormant MENT

Melodeath up-and-comen don't escape the shadow of the greats

On their 2021 debut album, Solitary, Hiraes lived firmly if capably in the shadow of melodeath favourites such as Arch Enemy. On their follow-up, the five-piece are still entrenched in convention and cliché. The flourishes they've introduced - the odd

electronic beat and melodically sung verse are little more than window dressing. Opening track Through The Storm could convincingly be a b-side from the latest Arch Enemy album, while Undercurrents' lyrics -'The thing that I regret, is what I haven't said!" - are cringe-inducingly bland. Whatever Hiraes try next needs to be a bold diversion if they don't want to go down as also-rans.

FOR FANS OF: Arch Enemy, Dark Tranquillity, Insomnium

MATT MILLS



LINNEA HJERTÉN Nio Systrar HOROVIS PRODUKTION

Ritualistic ambient super-heroics from the Swedish historiands

With her debut solo album, singer and sound engineer Linnea Hjertén marks herself out as a formidable talent. A whisper compared to the goth-boshed doom she plays as a member of Shaam Larein, Nio Systrar is nevertheless a bold statement. The nine tracks come together like a cocoon of spun glass, Hjertén's languageless vocal performance - recorded in a closet, no less - entwining with organic ebb-and-flow drones in a way that evokes everything from battle hymns to lullables, If there's fault to be found, it's that things occasionally err towards strangely familiar 'funeral of a beloved superhero' cinematics, It's a minor quibble, though, and one that does nothing to diminish a significant and often startling achievement.

FOR FANS OF: Anna von Hausswolff, Heilung, Forndom

ALEX DELLER



THE INFERNAL SEA
Hellfenlic
CANOLELIGHT

Historically minded black metallers take on the Witchfinder General

Three years after their superb Negotium Crucis album, masked marauders The Infernal Sea return with the Olde Englishinspired Hellfenlic, Telling the story of the infamous Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins, the UK quartet play their brand of black'n'roll to chart his rise and fall in brutal detail. The serrated guitars of Frozen Fen are suitably chilling, the savagery of Bastard Of The East suggests just how formidable Hopkins was, while the groove-laden classic metal of Witchfinder and wistful folk metal of the stirring Messenger Of God add textures and a range not heard from them before. This is also the cleanest they've ever sounded, and while that takes away some of what made their prior albums so vital, it's still an impassioned and intriguing history lesson from the plague doctors of BM.

FOR FANS OF: Wode, Dawn Ray'd, 1914



LORD DYING Clandestine Transcendence MNRK HEAVY

Pottland's sludge aggressors unleash a new, progressive strain

After two full-on sludge albums, the surprising classic rock leanings of 2019's Mysterium Tredemendum were a huge, if not quite fully mastered, leap forward for Lord Dying.

Five years later, they're clearly enjoying their genre-crossing ride with more confidence. It's most noticeable in the weird mid-album sequencing, where they switch effortlessly from Final Push Into The Sun's hardcorestyled aggression to the 90s Rush-reminiscent Dancing On The Emptiness, boosted by Kurt Ballou's organic production. But while they excel at both throughout these 12 songs, their joy in performing eightminute mini-epics with harmonised vocals and instant hooks suggest they're ready to leave their caveman tendencies behind for good and cross a threshold. And maybe they should.

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Kylesa, Rush OLIVIER BADIN



MADDER MORTEM Old Eyes, New Heart

Norway's dark metal mavericks continue to dazzle

Despite having delivered several classic albums during their 26-year existence, Madder Mortem seem cursed to be criminally undervalued. The Norwegians' esoteric blend of huge, alt-inclined riffs and ornate, emotionally dynamic melodies is certainly esoteric, but even the strangest songs on Old Eyes, New Heart have insidious, slow-burning hooks. As ever, the key to the band's melodramatic power lies in Agnete M. Kirkevaag's miraculous vocal performances, and her ability to make uproarious, art metal assaults like Coming From The Dark and Master Tongue sound both intimate and theatrical. From the noirish blues

throb of On Guard to the defiant, big rock roar of Towers, every song takes a subversive turn or two, while also packing the kind of emotional punch that necessitates major dental work. Another triumph from a fearless musical force.

FOR FANS OF: Oceans Of Slumber, Atrox, The Gathering

DOM LAWSON



MASTER Saints Dispelled HAMMERHEART

Death metal's maverick OG plays to a new set of strengths

As a founding father of death metal, but always at a slight remove from the rest of the scene, Paul Speckmann has maintained an enigmatic presence in the extreme metal underground for more than 40 years. Relocating from Chicago to the Czech Republic after the millennium, the imperious frontman at last established a stable Master line-up, lasting nearly 20 years until a recent change of drummer. This injection of new blood seems to have had a revitalising effect. Saints Dispelled proves more colourful and animated than 2018's Vindictive Miscreant, egging up the rock'n'roll spirit and reconnecting with their Motorhead influences to produce a sound less caustic and brutal, but wilder and more organic. Paul's singular force of personality gets ever more eccentric on endearingly quirky melodies like Find Your Life, sounding less barbaric death/thrash, more 80s videogame soundtrack.

FOR FANS OF: Obituary, Autopsy, Massacre CHRIS CHANTLER



FROSTBITE ORCKINGS

The Orcish Eclipse METALVERSE

AI-generated outfit fail to rewrite the fantasy metal code

WHEN IT COMES to the

enduring image of man vs machine, The Terminator's 'human skull getting crushed by a robot foot' takes some beating. But what James Cameron didn't - and perhaps couldn't show us was the fact that when the machines rise up,



they'll do it dressed as orcs. Singing jaunty second-rate Amon Amarth songs. Oh, the inhumanity.

Billed as the world's first AI-generated metal album, there will be suspicion levelled at Frostbite Orckings' The Orcish Eclipse. And we get it; even the name sounds more like keyword generation than the cheesy-but-effective, erm, elegance of Dragonforce or Hammerfall.

On its own merits, The Orcish Eclipse plays out like an oh-so-faithful take on epic sword-and-board metal championed by European bands such Amon Amarth, Brothers Of Metal and so many other dresser-uppers. But while the likes of Orcs Don't Cry and Into The Void are whimsical and bring the bombast that fans of those same bands will likely appreciate, tracks such as Hammers High are so shamelessly derivative that it borders on the offensive.

Therein lies the rub: Frostbite Orckings are an entity that is destined to imitate. While the songs (generally) aren't so bad as to consign them to the bottom of the bargain bin – though daft Europop–flavoured closer Endless Love comes close – they also lack the inherent glee of a manic Johan Hegg beating the shit out of a gigantic sea serpent that drives home the sense that the music means something to those making it.

In a year when AI debates helped bring Hollywood to a halt, it's difficult to imagine how much of an impact the existence of a band like Frostbite Orckings – and the wider 'Metalverse' – will have on heavy metal, but right now we'll stick with people in rubber suits all the same.

FOR FANS OF: Amon Amarth, Warkings, Ensiferum





LUCIFER Lucifer V

NUCLEAR BLAST

Stockholm's occult rock mesmerists find glory in the gloom

RISING FROM THE

ashes of the scintillating but short-lived The Oath in 2014, Lucifer have spent the last decade steadily spreading their wings and delivering some of the most chilling, thrilling and seriously catchy tunes in metal. Led by Johanna



Platow Andersson, their fifth album sees them refine and perfect their fusion of doom, occult and 70s shock rock, and features songwriting that's as sharp as their namesake's trident.

Conjuring up images of old Hammer and Amicus movies and full of hook-laden hybrid moments, Lucifer V sees these Stockholm-based misfits - who also include Johanna's other half, Nicke Andersson Platow of Entombed and Hellacopters fame in their ranks - at the peak of their powers. Much like Christopher Lee's Dracula whenever he locked those blood-red eyes on his victims, many of the nine tracks on offer are impossible to resist. Johanna turns her expressive vocals, which call to mind Heart's Ann Wilson, up to 13 throughout, and she treats us to some creepy, cheese-sprinkled sermons about sin, death and love affairs with the undead.

Fallen Angel opens the LP with a roar. An electrifying blast of heavy metal thunder, it boasts lightning-fast fretwork, Thin Lizzy-esque riffs and a massive book. The gloom-laden, piano-led waltz Slow Dance In A Crypt orbits around Led Zeppelin's Dazed And Confused to summon a live anthem in the making, while the organ-spiced, dark love song At The Mortuary has a chorus that could raise the dead. Nothing Left To Lose But My Life ends the album strongly. A bombastic power ballad that drips with drama, this show-stopping curtain-closer is a magnetic re-imagining of 60s girl group torch songs.

Bursting with ambition and energy from start to finish, Lucifer's latest is a reminder that the Devil still has the best tunes.

FOR FANS OF: Ghost, Sabbath Assembly, The Oath **EDWIN McFEE**



MOUNTAIN CALLER Chronicle II: Hypergenesis CHLIRCH ROAD

Condon-based progressive stoner prio seek a natural high

Having cultivated plenty of admirers after their 2020 debut album, Chronicle I: The Truthseeker, the anticipation among stoner and prog circles for Mountain Catter's sequel is understandably great. Looking beyond their London base to take inspiration from the natural world, their instrumental riffs and noodling feel euphoric on the illuminating Daybreak and punch of The Archivist. However, the most exciting moment comes in Dead Language - not just for its myriad builds and reflective troughs, but for soothing and powerful vocals to give the band's sound a thrilling new dimension. Into The Hazel Woods' heavy wah pedal and March Of The Göll's ominous crunch take the tail-end of the album into darker realms, before the soaring closing title track.

FOR FANS OF: Elder. Baroness, Mastodon ADAM BRENNAN



NICK OLIVERI N.O. Hits at All Vols 8 & 9 HEAVY PENCH SOURCE

Rock in roll's favourite grebo finds more treasures in his trunk

Nick Oliveri is one of rock's most entertaining journeymen. From playing with Kyuss and Queens Of The Stone Age to fist-fighting the audience naked in The Dwarves, he's seen and

done it all. Now comes the latest brace of fun comps, full of Nick's seemingly bottomless well of solo efforts and one-off collabs. Vol 8 features Chains And Shackles, a sleazy headbanger with power metal shredding from Slash. There's a cover of Ringo Starr's Back Off Boogalo with Thee Slayer Hippy of Poison Idea fame, and a drawling acoustic GG Allin cover. Vol 9 has unreleased tracks from Nick's Mondo Generator band and a killer iam with stoner rock champs Nebula. A surprise around every corner.

FOR FANS OF: Queens Of The Stone Age, Mondo Generator, The Dwarves

KEN MOINTYRE



ROUGH JUSTICE Faith In Vain MILYLTD MUSIC

Hardcore-infused debutants lay all their options on the table

Sheffield rubber-stamped itself as the home for the UK's best young metal bands more than a decade ago. Bring Me the Horizon, Malevolence, While She Sleeps and Rolo Tomassi form an impressive list. Rough Justice aren't quite at that level yet, but show enough promise on their debut album to suggest they could muscle their way into the conversation in the future. There's that classic. pummeiling hardcore strut on songs like When it Comes; 90s, melodic, Smashing Pumpkins-esque alt rock vibes on Rusting; and even some Korn-esque grooves on Overruled. As a whole, Faith In Vain is a touch too ramshackle, but all the elements are in place for future greatness.

FOR FANS OF: Malevolence, Nasty, Get The Shot STEPHEN HILL

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe



BLACKFLOW Seeds Of Downfall PERSONAL

Epic heavy/doom bands are reliant on their frontman. Helped by a modern production, Marcelo Prades elevates this Chilean debut's classic Candlemass/ Sorcerer leanings to unexpected heights.

OLIVIER BADIN



SADISM Obscurans HAMMERHEART

Chilean DM veterans who take a raw and unfussy approach to the Devil's work. Exsanguination and Ars Goetia brandish their old-school ethics like bloody, blunt instruments. Chaos ensues.

------DOM LAWSON



SOLITARY SABRED Temple Of The Serpent VINYL STORE

These Cypriot true metallers hit all the crucial notes on their third LP; rousing melodies, heads-down riffs, fulsome solos, and the valiant, warrior-like vocals and storytelling conviction of frontman Asgardlord.

-----CHRIS CHANTLER



SATANIC WITCH 4:44

Wolvennest and E-L-R members iay out an eclectic, occult path

On their debut, this occult Belgian/Swiss supergroup explore many more moods than their rather on-thenose moniker suggests. Mirror Hour launches on a lightning-speed whirlwind of blasting drums, droning chords and angel-ravaging tremolo abuse before breaking down to a cavernous, ceremonial creepy-crawl. Meanwhile, the archly titled Kult goes full Type O dreamy goth-doom, a crusty black metal spine poking through with hyperactive drums and backing rasps. For None progresses from a warm, woozy psychedelic ritual to a merciless imperial attack. The arty ambient stretches are less assured and generally skippable, but provide a degree of colour and contrast, and usually go somewhere interesting. The only downside is the interminable 13-minute Mirage/Die Hexen, whose goth-industrial dancefloor tendencies could at least teach Morbid Angel a thing OF two.

FOR FANS OF: Emperor, Satyricon, Oranssi Pazuzu CHRIS CHANTLER



SLIFT llion SUB POP

France's wild, psych rock voyagers bulldoze past the light fantastic

If you were fond of Slift as a decent, riff-slinging stoner act, then prepare to

have the lid of your head. kicked off and an electric whisk taken to its insides. Since 2020's Ummon they've travelled beyond the outer limits and returned bearing strange, alien gifts. The band throw everything from psych, prog and post-metal to drug-fuddled industrial into a swirling, exploratory vortex that is both thrilling and bewildering. Everything booms, howls and crashes with joyful abandon, but welded to their wild experimentation is a marshalled togetherness that ensures you stick with them every step of the way. Like Jesu on a Hawkwind tip or Loop by way of High On Fire, Illon is dense, deft and dizzyingly vertiginous a blurred, ideas-rich album that beckons 'come hither' as it steps boldly over the edge.

FOR FANS OF: Chrome, Teeth Of The Sea, Ashenspire

ALEX DELLER



SLOWER Slower HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Southern shadge metal luminosies get high on Araya

Slower formed after Fu Manchu guitarist Bob Balch slowed down South Of Heaven's main riff for a student, and a bloodsplattered light bulb blinked on. Reaching out to various dope-rock luminaries, he formed = you guessed it - the world's slowest Slayer cover band. Slayer's music was born of manic punk energy, Fu Manchu's of weed and boogle vans, but Slayer's music is epic, crushing metal at any tempo. Show No Mercy's show-stopper, The Antichrist, is blown out here into truly epic doom

with flowy, siren's call vocals from Laura Pleasants (ex-Kylesa) and Year Of The Cobra's Army Barrysmith. Dead Skin Mask is grungy, psychedelic sludge. South Of Heaven itself ends the album on a sexy, sinister note, transformed into a seven-minute slither of ethereal vocals and throbbing riffs. A real headspinner of an album.

-----FOR FANS OF: Slaver, Kyuss, Kylesa KEN MINTYRE



SOUTH OF SALEM Death Of The Party SPIDER PARTY

Buzz-generating alt rockers find new thrills in the familiar

South Of Salem's 2020 debut, The Sinner Takes It All, caused barely a ripple at the time, but, in the run-up to their second album, the band are stomping into 2024 with a buzz at their backs. The Bournemouth goth metallers just completed a sold-out UK tout, and Death Of The Party is packed with earworms gluier than chewing gum on the bottom of your shoe down your favourite venue. The band pull from across the heavy spectrum to create their sound, blending 80s classic metal and sleaze rock with hints of Gothenburg riffery, a good dollop of Misfits horrorpunk and bags of Stone Sour's anthemic hard rock. It all adds up to a sound that feels incredibly familiar - South Of Salem aren't exactly reinventing the wheel here, but the sheer class of the post-grunge-inspired Static and the radio-friendly Left For Dead and Jet Black Eyes are undeniable.

FOR FANS OF: Stone Sour, Judas Priest, Seether DANNII LEIVERS



RYUJIN

Ryujin NAPALM

Japan's Matt Heafy-mentored folk/power metallers enter a new era

PREVIOUSLY KNOWN

AS Gyze, the Matt Heafyproduced and mentored Ryujin are primed for global domination with their unique brand of samural metal. Flexing traditional Japanese instruments like the shamisen, erhu and dragon flute, their



eponymous fifth album brims with traditional folk elements. Meanwhile, the meteoric shredding and raspy vocals of Ryoji Shinomoto are emblematic of Ryujin's past, losing nothing in their profundity and aggression.

Ryujin's fierce six-string tactics loom large on album opener proper Gekokujo, unleashing Ryoji's breakneck riffs. But it's outdone in its ferocity by Dragon, Fly Free's flute-meets-thrash turnult and Scream Of The Dragon, which segues from dizzying Children Of Bodom-style licks to a saccharine, clean-sung chorus.

Evoking the energy of the band's home region via the language of the indigenous Ainu people, many of the songs here nod to Japanese culture. Raijin & Fujin, taken from the names of the Japanese gods of thunder and wind, fuses rattling double bass drums and blistering riffs with Eastern instruments and melodies. The Rainbow Song then steams in with classic power metal riffing and hooks inspired by 90s anime.

It would be remiss to not take into account Heafy's massive influence on this album, whether as producer, guest vocalist (on four songs) or spiritual guide. His vocal inclusions offer a new dimension to Ryujin's sound, his recognisable choral cameo on Raijin & Fujin striking the perfect balance with Ryoji's formidable growls. The slick production peaks on the rich and virtuosic title track, but there are occasional moments where Heafy's studio magic falls short, sounding muddled in places and failing to give Mukai Wataru's guest cello a starring role on Kunnecup. Despite this, Ryujin's strategic reincarnation offers a wider stage for their unique brand of samural metal and promises exciting things to come.

FOR FANS OF: Dragonforce, Moonsorrow, Trivium HOLLY WRIGHT



SAXON Hell, Fire And Damnation

SILVER LINING MUSIC

Brit metal veterans keep their wheels of steel turning

2022'S CARPE DIEM saw Saxon breach the UK album chart Top 20 for the first time since 1984's Crusader, but it didn't mark a huge resurgence. They've had the odd dip, of course, but Saxon

never went away and, over the course of an impressive 23-album back catalogue, they've retained a remarkable consistency. They have their own place in metal history, an established fanbase and an instantly recognisable sound. On album 24 they're not likely to be presenting anything

jaw-droppingly different, so the main question Hell, Fire And Damnation has to answer is whether it succeeds on the band's own terms.

The answer is a resounding yes. Over the years, Saxon have dabbled in grandiose power metal and close-tospeed-metal bangers. The core remains the same mid-paced fists-in-the-air anthems they've been forging since their NWOBHM glory days, however, and it's a format they've now honed to perfection. The album starts with a spoken-word intro that strays perilously close to Spinal Tap's Stonehenge, but does get automatic

awesome points by dint of being delivered by Brian Blessed. The opening title track begins with surprising shades of Metallica's Creeping Death before Biff Byford issues a scream and it settles into

> the sort of riff-driven metallic rocker that influenced Lars Ulrich and co in the first place.

Elsewhere, they deliver musical and lyrical history lessons with the likes of Madame Guillotine, 1066 and Kubia Khan And The Merchant Of Venice. Get Saxon, Iron Maiden and Sabaton together and you

could put together a full curriculum. Fire And Steel appears to celebrate Sheffield in the spark-showering vein of Princess Of The Night, while There's Something In Roswell rides a chugging groove and singalong hooks that grip like an Alien Facehugger. It won't change the face of music or knock the world off its axis, but Hell, Fire And Damnation is yet another damned fine addition to Saxon's everexpanding catalogue.

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, W.A.S.P., Iron Maiden

PAUL TRAVERS



SUPER PINK MOON Inertia SELFRELEASED

Anxiety Mricken mediation from the Ukrainian frontlines

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine has resulted in the largest European refugee crisis since World War II. The feeling of helplessness to meaningfully intervene is maddening. Inertia, the state of things remaining unchanged, is a perfect title to sum up those feelings of frustration. Since 2019, Somali Yacht Club's Ihor Pryshliak has used Super Pink Moon as an expression of his anxiety as a Ukrainian citizen. Opener Eventually juxtaposes dream-like melodic singing with discordant distorted chords, evoking the forays into blissful noise that Deftones adopted on their self-titled 2003 album. Lost, meanwhile, is a languid and luscious mediation. A beautiful record birthed by calamitous acts.

FOR FANS OF: Deftones, Jesu, Somali Yacht Club REMFRY DEDMAN



TENSIDE Come Alive Dying NORYTOWER

Teutonic modern metalcore outfit keep most of their cueds in the pack

Tenside make raw, hardhitting metalcore - they just haven't worked out how to make it exciting. Come Alive Dying has thrashing riffs, clamorous blastbeats and gristly gutturals, but it all congeals into a formless glob. While Shadow To Shine, Impending Doom and Transcend are

onslaughts of howling adrenaline, they can be quickly slung aside to join the ever-growing 'modern metalcore' pile. Tech-tinged closer Dust Of The Bereaved does end things on an echoing, optimistic note, allowing Tenside's polished production to shine. While Come Alive Dying fails to stand out from the crowd, Tenside have potential.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Fit For A King, Trivium

EMILY SWINGLE



THERION Leviathan III NAPALM

Swedish symphonic metal masters round our their conceptual trilogy

Christofer Johnsson, Therion's mastermind for 35 years, concludes the epic splurge of material he amassed in lockdown. This is the last chapter in the Leviathan trilogy, announced as the more versatile entry after two albums of concertedly archetypal, even self-referential, popsavvy symphonic metal 101. Actually, it's still pretty safe, trad Therion, playing to their many strengths, if more of a journey than its predecessors. Opening traces of vituperative Swedish DM co-exist with acoustic folk, stadium rock, musical theatre, emotive operatics, horror soundtrack choirs, dextrous prog-metal riffs and heroic squealing solos. This feels like the most satisfyingly rounded, expansive Levinthan set, with something here for everyone - if Therion fatigue hasn't set in after three similar albums in as many years.

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, Amorphis, Epica CHRIS CHANTLER



UPON STONE Dead Mother Moon CENTURY MEDIA

Colifornian melodeath debutants pull from unusual soundscapes

Citing both At The Gates' Slaughter Of The Soul and powerviolence idols Nails as influences, Upon Stone present a particularly ferocious strain of melodeath on their fulllength debut. Dead Mother Moon's title track opens the album in a tirade of blistering and slightly blackened yet melodic riffs, and Paradise Failed's intensity is hammered home by a guest turn from Shadows Fall vocalist Brian Fair, Dusk Sang Fairest juxtaposes a whimsical folk metal guitar line against a crushing rhythmic riff, before a bonus cover of Misfits' Dig Up Her Bones shows striking brevity and even more non-melodeath influence. The end result is nine songs that, bar the obligatory mid-album ambient interlude, have no wasted space. Upon Stone still have room to integrate their unconventional inspirations in a host of different ways.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, At The Gates, Arch Enemy

MATT MILLS



VIPASSI Lightless SEASON OF MIST

Ne Obliviscaris and Hadai Maw members get cosmic

Acknowledging the debt tech death owes to jazz and prog, Vipassi have turned their talents to ambient

instrumental adventure. The brainchild of Hadal Maw guitarist Ben Boyle and Ne Obliviscaris drummer Daniel Presland, the extremity of their day jobs persists on their debut album. Relentless blasts and riffing savagery are made zen, with swelling cosmic ambience and the entrancing warmth of Virvum bassist Arran McSportan's fretless wizardry allowing the melodic beauty that's always been part of the genre to breathe. Morningstar's bass and guitars are a twinkling, spiralling starfield amid the percussive chaos. Neon Rain embraces free jazz, its drums unbound, with Benjamin Baret's epic soloing providing an anchor. Firmly at the nerdier end of the metal spectrum, Lightless is testament to the calibre of musicianship thriving in tech death, and captivating in its cosmic complexity.

FOR FANS OF: Animals As Leaders, Cynic, Exivious TOM O'BOYLE



VITRIOL Suffer And Become CENTURY MEDIA

Premium Portland death metal that crushes all in its path

Death metal bands like to compete to be the fastest, nastiest and filthiest, but Vitriol score so highly on all counts that they tower over most of their peers. Their 2019 debut, To Bathe From The Throat Of Cowardice, was defined by its psychotic intensity and the impenetrable darkness that enveloped every blast-driven riff. Suffer And Become simply ups the ante, as Vitriol become an even more overwhelming, oppressive and violent force. Impressively, they

have also remembered to add depth and the occasional nuance to the claustrophobic deluge. The opening Shame And Its Afterbirth is nigh-on seven manutes of bewildering controlled chaos with wild guitar solos that border on the ecstatic. Flood Of Predation is a haunted whirlpool of acrid blastbeats and hot bile. Vitriol are terrifyingly good.

FOR FANS OF: Hate Eternal, Hideous Divinity, Throne DOM LAWSON



YERSIN The Scythe is Remorseless

Sanderland grindcore trio univash an effective second assoult

Yersin's second album is a powerful mix of savage grindcore and sludgy guitar tones, with a smattering of unexpected creative ideas thrown in for good measure. The lullabyesque piano that opens Triumphant provides a brief calm before the storm. with the band displaying an understanding of dynamism often lacking in their peers. While grindcore's full-throttle acceleration is present throughout, the trio allow room for slower, groovier tempos that sustain the album's momentum over 25 minutes without familiarity dampening the impact. At just seven songs, The Scythe... is a reversal of the 'more songs is more' ethos that allows each to stand up on their own merits. Yersin aren't in the same league as the very best the genre has to offer just yet, but they display enough creative ideas and individuality to rise up the ranks.

FOR FANS OF: Napaim Death, Nails, Wormrot REMFRY DEDMAN



VEMOD

The Deepening PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Norway's atmospheric black metallers make a transformative leap

EMERGING FROM NAMSOS, a cradle of Norway's rich metal heritage, Vemod return with their long-awaited second outing. Their 2012 debut, Venter På Stormene, was a decent, If slightly generic, offering, but The Deepening elevates the trio's sonic



alchemy to new stirring new heights.

Vemod's ability to weave together the dimensions of time and space is evident here. It's as if they have absorbed the ethereal essence and rugged beauty of Norwegian fjords and mountains and transformed it into sound, embodied by teleportational soundscapes like Fra Drømmenes Bok I. This connection to nature and their Nidrosian black metal roots remains strong, yet the post-punk gothic undertones of Inn I Lysande Natt establish the lengths to which Vemod have committed to expanding their sonic palette. Within these six tracks, waves of profound melancholia and probing introspection are interwoven with a wider array of emotional and vivid sonic Imagery. It's a shift that echoes the trajectory of French contemporaries Alcest, yet Vernod retain a distinct, Norwegian identity.

The 16-minute title track closes the album with a devastating emotional crescendo. Here the band experiment with myriad styles and longer, more complex compositions, revealing intricate layers and evolving themes that affirm the album's message of transformation and growth. It's a compelling demonstration of the band's refusal to be pigeonholed.

The Deepening is more than a step forward from its predecessor; it's a giant leap. Vernod have crafted an experience that is not only musically profound but philosophically stirring. It represents a critical moment, capturing the band transcending their debut and announcing them as pioneers of a sound that defies conventional boundaries. An ideal companion for some much-needed solitude on a cold winter night.

FOR FANS OF: Harakiri For The Sky, Violet Cold, Ellende HOP DAILY